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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5648  
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE  
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0138  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 3715  
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 7236  
RUDKIA/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 0821  
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 3023  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0674  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC  
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000093

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STATE FOR EAP AND IO; PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/26/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: BURMA: RELEASED PRO-DEMOCRACY LEADERS STRATEGIZE  
AND TEST THE WATERS

REF: A. RANGOON 41

[1](#)B. RANGOON 81

Classified By: P/E Chief Leslie Hayden for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Recently released leaders of the 88 Generation Students, Min Ko Naing and Ko Ko Gyi, appreciate the United States' efforts to pass a UNSC resolution on Burma and emphasize their group is not discouraged by China's and Russia's vetoes. They believe the regime is gearing up for a national referendum on the constitution, which it has carefully crafted to ensure continued hold on power. The 88 Generation leaders are working to expand their organization into Burma's regions and are buoyed by small signs of success from their recent campaigns. Their movement will continue to work to educate the Burmese people on human rights and encourage more of the population to put aside their fear and join in their efforts to bring democracy to Burma. End summary.

The National Convention  
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[1](#)2. (C) Pol/ Econ Chief met with recently released leaders of the 88 Generation Students (88GS), Min Ko Naing and Ko Ko Gyi. The leaders expressed their appreciation for U.S. efforts to pass a resolution in the UNSC and stressed they were not discouraged by its failure to pass. Min Ko Naing emphasized that Burma's economic and social problems are so serious that the military regime cannot solve them on its own: Burma's leaders must enlist the support of Burma's people and the international community. Only inclusive dialogue with Burma's democratic opposition and ethnic representatives can bring about a permanent and peaceful solution to Burma's problems. Min Ko Naing believes the National Convention (NC) in its current form cannot succeed. The regime has excluded from its constitution drafting process the very people who won the overwhelming support of the population in the 1990 elections. A constitution that does not have the support of the majority is not likely to stand the test of time, Min Ko Naing stressed. He noted that, as the National Convention winds up, ethnic cease-fire groups are also becoming more dissatisfied and wondering what

exactly they gained from entering into the regime's manipulated "seven-step roadmap to democracy."

13. (C) When asked if they were strong-armed to endorse the National Convention process during their detention, Min Ko Naing and Ko Ko Gyi said that they were not specifically asked to endorse the NC, but were interrogated about their views of the process and reminded that anyone who works against the NC is subject to arrest and imprisonment under the regime's laws. Elaborating on possible reasons for their release (ref A), Min Ko Naing and Ko Ko Gyi speculated that a combination of international pressure and the unexpected success of the interim leaders' campaigns to release them had caused disagreement among the top Generals, who had expected 88GS members to flee or go underground when their leaders were detained, rather than initiating public campaigns calling for their release. Min Ko Naing also felt the timing of their detention and release was significant - they were detained shortly before the beginning of the latest session of the National Convention and released soon after it ended to keep them from disrupting the session.

14. (C) Min Ko Naing and Ko Ko Gyi stressed they believe the regime is beginning to focus on and organize an upcoming constitutional referendum. The 88GS want pro-democracy groups in Burma and the international community to begin to think about how to respond if the referendum is not free and fair, or if the regime's constitution is rejected and the military refuses to honor the results, as happened in the 1990 election. Min Ko Naing said the 88 Generation Students want to find a solution to Burma's political impasse that will allow both the regime and the pro-democracy groups to preserve their dignity.

RANGOON 00000093 002 OF 002

#### Testing the Waters

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15. (C) 88 Generation leaders will attend Australian National Day celebrations on January 26, in an effort to expand their contacts among Rangoon's wider diplomatic community, outreach that Embassy Rangoon has encouraged the students to pursue. Additionally, several of their leaders, including Min Ko Naing, Ko Ko Gyi, Phone Cho, Mya Aye, and Jimmy, will travel to Taung Dwin Gyi in Magwe Division this weekend, ostensibly to attend a member's wedding but also to reach out to and organize human rights and pro-democracy activists in the area. They informed Police Special Branch of their trip and plan to organize similar trips in the future should this one succeed.

16. (C) Ko Ko Gyi advised us to keep an eye on the Tuesday prayer vigils for Aung San Suu Kyi at Shwe Dagon Pagoda (ref B). Naw Ohn Hla, who leads the vigils, is determined to proceed with them, while regime officials, led by Minister of Information Kyaw Hsan and Rangoon Commander Brig-Gen Hla Htay Win, are determined to stop them. Ko Ko Gyi claimed that military officers may soon be brought to the pagoda to crack down on the crowds and warned that the scene could turn violent.

#### Small Successes

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17. (C) The 88 Generation leaders are encouraged by groups of ordinary citizens who are emboldened by their campaigns and standing up for their rights in small ways. According to Jimmy, in the village of Chauk (Magwe Division), a Myanmar Electrical Power official collected seventy thousand Kyats (about US\$60) from over one hundred households, promising them meter boxes that he never produced. The villagers organized and threatened to complain to Than Shwe using the 88 Generation's "Open Hearts" letter campaign unless he returned their money. Unexpectedly, the official reimbursed the villagers. 88 Generation members have also recently

assisted garment workers in Rangoon to organize and successfully protest unfair labor practices at their factory.

¶8. (C) Comment: Min Ko Naing and Ko Ko Gyi, both who have spent over fifteen years in prison, emerged from their recent detention even more focused than before. Min Ko Naing's famous sense of humor is intact and both leaders appear strong, steady, and ready to forge ahead. They will continue to maintain their informal alliance with lower-level officials in the NLD, although they prefer to keep a distance from the elderly NLD "Uncles," who tend to disapprove of their activism. The 88 Generation movement appears to be gaining strength as its leaders emerge to fill the leadership vacuum in the pro-democracy movement caused by Aung San Suu Kyi's continued detention and the NLD's weak and inactive leadership. End comment.  
STOLTZ